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The Shudikova stone

Present interpretations, guidelines for further consideration

Summary

The present paper deals with a massive rectangular stone block with five of six surfaces covered with carefully engraved runiform signs. Today preserved in the Museum of Upper Lim region (Muzej Polimlja) in Berane, NO Montenegro, it has been found in 1923-24. in the ruins of the monastery Shudikova (Šudikova) situated on the right bank of the river Lim, two kilometres downstream of Berane, at the mouth of Tifran gorge. According to the rapport of its discoverer, it was built into the church wall in a way that clearly indicates a spolium. Already the first Serbian scholars who payed attention to the signs on it pointed out their great similarity with the Proto-Bulgarian runes, which was subsequently accepted and variously interpreted by Bulgarian authors. In view of the repeated occurrence on the stone of the symbol IYI presumedly designating the highest sky-god Tangra/Tengri, it seems to be a Proto-Bulgarian monument of pagan character, probably an altar or tomb-stone. Consequently it can hardly have been erected between 924 and 927 A.D., the only period when this region together with the rest of Serbia was incorporated into the First Bulgarian Empire, which was at that time half a century Christian and largely Slavicized. Since the Christianity threatened Proto-Bulgarian nobility not only with distruction of their traditional religion, but also with the loss of their native tongue against the Slavic language favoured by the Church, more imaginable is a relatively small Proto-Bulgarian pagan enclave within the Old Serbian territory, arosen at the end of the 9th century, after the pagan reaction in Bulgaria under the khan Vladimir Rasate had been crushed in 893 A.D. and fifty of his noble followers (*boili*) killed together with their families, an outcome of events that must have incited many others to flee in the neighbouring countries. The semi-christianized Serbia of that time should have been tolerant enough and also politically interested to recieve some Bulgarian refugies of Turkic stock and give them a place to live in accordance with their native customs, including the possibility of erecting monuments of those pagan cults whose preservation was the very reason of their exile. The existence of such an enclave can hardly have lasted over thirty years and survived the destroying conquest of Serbia by Bulgarian Christian ruler Symeon in 924. Alternatively, one might assume the Shudikova runes being a phenomenon of cultural intercourse rather than of ethnical contacts, and see in them those “lines and incisions” (*črty i rezy*) which according to the Monk Chrabr (9th century) were in use among the pagan Slavs before they accepted Christianity together with Slavic alphabet created by Constantine-Cyril, but there is lack of evidence to support such a hypothesis.